



BEYOND THE FRINGEFAN

[#574]

BEYOND THE FRINGEFAN has fallen 'way behind on his to-do list recently, in consequence of his wife having had a lulu of a month, but he's trying not to cry boo-hoo about it; that would certainly be a boo-boo and drive him cuckoo. He's managing to pay the bills and handle other stuff to prevent landing in deep doo-doo. Those wanting to talk to him can say yoo-hoo at the N.Y. Cadre (1088 East 40th Street, Brooklyn, New York 11210 (☎(718) NY-CADRE; 🖨↔️ nycadre [at] acedsl [dot] com; 🌐http://www [dot] nycadre [dot] org), or perhaps stick pins in a doll and contact him by voodoo. This is **Beyond the Fringefan** #574, for readers of **APA-~~nunu~~NYU** Volume 24, #9 (e-APA-NYU #250) and other gurus who wear a tutu and fear Cthulhu, published September 2026 as a combined production of Quick Brown Fox Press and Syscrash Consulting, both subsidiaries of **THIGAMAJIG**. Cartoon above by Maritsa Patrinos for *6 Chix*, 30 August 2019. All uncredited material copyright ©2026 by Marc S. Glasser. Member fwa.

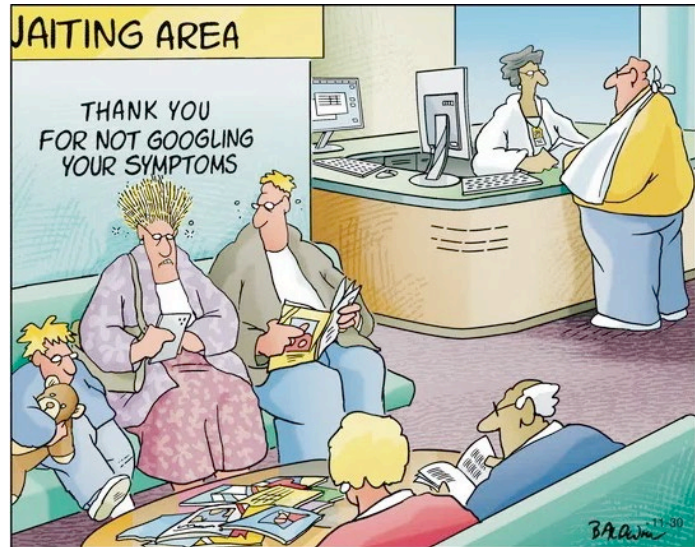
I HEART CARDIOLOGY: Donna was feeling a bit blah throughout August, going back to bed shortly after breakfast on a lot of days because of backaches that were worse sitting up than lying down. But on Sunday 30 August, she complained of chest pain. This seemed like a dire enough symptom to justify seeking medical attention, though it wasn't until late in the day that she finally let us persuade her to visit the nearest urgent-care clinic (one she's gone to a few times before). But when we got her dressed and down to the front door, she said she was feeling too weak to make it down the front steps and into the car. This forced a change of plans, and we called Hatzalah to send an ambulance to get her to the ER at Methodist in Park Slope, her hospital of choice (her PCP and most of her specialists are affiliated there).

We've been to emergency rooms enough times by now to know that nothing was going to happen very fast, though I've heard that the phrase "chest pain" is frequently enough to light a fire under the triage people. As it was, Donna spent the whole night and the next morning in the ER, with side trips to various imaging rooms (x-ray and CAT scan, I believe). Ethan hung out for several hours but finally had to go home and put in some time taking care of Him Who Shares 25% of My Chromosomes. I stayed there until he came back Monday afternoon.

After taking numerous blood samples for testing, the doctors finally told her that she wasn't having a heart attack; there had been a brief rise in her level of troponin, which can be a myocardial marker, but it was then dropping, whereas it would have continued to rise in a heart attack. They diagnosed

costochondritis, an inflammation of the cartilage in the rib cage (I was going to ask if Costco chondritis would be cheaper to treat, but then I remembered we don't have a membership)—along with possible GERD and gastritis, plus a urinary tract infection. They started her on antibiotics and anti-inflammatories, some delivered intravenously.

They also found that her potassium was appallingly low, which could account for the weakness. (Donna's had issues with potassium before; some of her other meds, in particular the diuretics they prescribe to lower her high blood pressure, cause the kidneys to push potassium out in the urine.) The recommendation was to add potassium to her IV infusions; but for some reason, IV potassium tends to cause severe stinging pain at the site where the tube enters the patient's vein. Seconds after the nurse connected the potassium bag, Donna was howling in pain. Told that the full dose would take four hours to infuse, she yelled at the nurse to disconnect the potassium and give the mineral to her orally instead. It took some argument to convince the ER people that four hours of howling in pain was not conducive to the patient's healing when a less painful alternative was available.



(Corrored by Mike Baldwin, 30 November 2025)

With all that was going on, the hospital wanted to admit Donna and keep her under observation for a couple of days. Not unusually, it took them the better part of a day to find a room for her, and she got settled on the seventh floor sometime Monday night (Ethan had gotten back by then, and I'd gone home to crash).

Donna enjoyed the tender mercies of Methodist's seventh floor staff for a couple of days, with Ethan and me splitting visiting hours, but on Thursday morning, 3 September, I got a call from a cardiologist. Donna had had more chest pain, and her troponin levels had risen again and continued to rise. The hospital had shifted her to the cardiac unit on the fifth floor for closer monitoring—telemetry, they called it. They spent the next day doing more tests and imaging, and finally determined that Donna was still not having a myocardial infarction, the garden-variety heart attack that's caused by a blocked cardiac blood vessel (and usually requires bypass surgery to treat). Instead, the doctors told us, she was suffering from "stress cardiomyopathy." Some stress had weakened her heart to where it was not pumping enough blood through her system. What stress? Could have been the costochondritis, the infections, the yelling at the nurse about the potassium, something else entirely, or some combination thereof.

(There are even cases of the condition caused by severe emotional, not physical, stress, like a messy divorce. They call that "broken heart syndrome." Yeah, medical professionals seem to like cute names for the conditions they treat. Turns out that stress cardiomyopathy is also called "takotsubo cardiomyopathy." Why? A Japanese doctor in the 1990s noted that the left ventricle of a heart so afflicted balloons out and takes on a shape resembling a round trap used by Japanese fishermen for trapping octopuses and lobsters. The trap is called a tako-tsubo.)

Whatever the stressor that drives a heart into this condition, the medics have found that the heart can usually recover without bypass surgery, given a little time and help. The help involves threading a tube through an artery into the heart—kids, don't try this at home!—and connecting an external pump that literally assists the heart in its work, giving it some rest and recuperation time. They did this to Donna in an operating room on Friday evening, 4 September, and then moved her into the coronary intensive care unit, connected to a bunch of monitors, IV tubes, and the arterial tubes, with the “balloon pump” attached to her leg.

For the pump to work properly and all the tubes to stay in place, she had to lie flat on her back as long as the pump was connected. That in turn meant that they wouldn't let her eat anything that wasn't pureed, for fear of choking while trying to swallow in a supine position. What did they give her? Hummus—which she used to like to dip vegetables in, but found utterly unappetizing by itself. Mashed potatoes. Applesauce. When Ethan or I was there, we spoon-fed her; the nurses did it when we weren't.



(Gary McCoy in *Parade* magazine sometime in the 1990s)

I should mention that Donna had had a hacking cough since soon after her arrival in the hospital. X-rays determined that she had a build-up of fluid in her lungs, probably a side effect of the coronary insufficiency. The doctors added furosemide a/k/a Lasix, a strong diuretic, to her regimen in the hope of clearing out the fluid. Thank the ghods they have a device called PrimaFit that fits over the crotch and carries away urine to a separate receptacle....

After several hours, the cardiologists decided that the balloon pump wasn't doing enough to ease the burden on Donna's heart, and they switched it out for a more powerful pump known as Impella. There was even talk about using an even stronger pump that would have required real surgery to implant—but fortunately, by Sunday evening, Donna's numbers were starting to show improvement. The doctors turned the Impella down to a lower setting on Monday, 7 September, and took it out of her on Tuesday night. When I got there on Wednesday, they were allowing her to sit up (kinda sorta—the hospital bed didn't really come up that far, and she still got back pain from the bending) for the first time in five days, and permitting solid food. She celebrated by having me bring in a burger and fries from the Five Guys across the street, which gave her heartburn, but she said it was worth it.

Donna was showing all the signs the doctors were looking for to indicate that she was recovering, but they weren't about to kick her out too fast. It took another couple of days before they took out the arterial tubes and moved her from ICU to a regular cardiac bed. Her mobility, not great even before the whole megillah started, had suffered more through two weeks of being bedridden. With the help of a hospital physical therapist, she made a couple of attempts to get off the bed and into a chair, but they were abortive. Though she was longing to go home, we all had to agree that she needed to spend some time in rehab first, getting some intensive PT and OT.

Accordingly, on Wednesday 16 September, Donna was discharged from the hospital and transferred by ambulance to Ditmas Park Nursing and Rehab, about halfway between the hospital and the Cadre. She's stayed there before, and so have I, so a lot of the nurses there greeted us like old friends. Since then she's started getting PT, but for the first week, she wasn't strong enough to get out of the bed without mechanical assistance, so it mostly involved the therapist coming up to her room, helping her into a sitting position on the edge of the bed, and having her do leg lifts. It wasn't until Friday 25 September

that she started getting moved to a wheelchair on a more or less daily basis and brought down to the PT gym in Ditmas Park's basement to get lengthier workouts.

Based on a meeting we had the previous day with a nurse, a social worker, and the lady in charge of the PT department, it appears likely that much of October will come and go before Donna is in physical condition to come home and resume her previous level of activity. Making sure she can make it up the front steps will be a priority.

What with running up to the hospital or the rehab every day and staying for four to six hours to assist Donna, I've let a lot of ordinarily routine things slide. I haven't read and commented most of my daily comic strips in almost a month, for example, and I've let the online games slide (other than the crossword puzzles that I could print out and work on in the room while Donna was napping). Just before it all happened, though, I did get to the milestone of 1600 rounds of Wordle played, with only 8 losses, giving me once again a win percentage of 99.5%, which the website rounds up to 100%. When all this is over, I'll resume Connections and Strands, but I believe I'll retire quasi-undefeated from Wordle. (Last time I hit this milestone was almost two years ago, and I blew a game within two weeks afterward.)

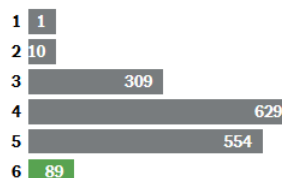


Congratulations!

STATISTICS

1600	100	184	184
Played	Win %	Current Streak	Max Streak

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Fringe Reception: Comments on APA-NYU, Volume 24, #8 (e-APA-NYU #249)

JAMISON, TAKE e-LETTER (Mark L. Blackman):
(¢me) "I'd say East 70th Street was on the Upper EAST Side." You're right, of course; my labeling it "West" would be my Mistake of the Month for July. /*/ "How is 'The Brooklyn Accent' a pun on your initials, (MSG)?" "Ac'cent" was (and still is) a trademark for a food additive known generically as monosodium glutamate—or MSG. /*/ (¢bacover) "Weren't the Gabor Sisters the most emotional Hungarians?" Likely so. Also, they were already in their teens and twenties and starting their careers (and Zsa Zsa was two years into her first marriage) when Paul Dirac married Wigner's sister in 1937, so they were probably emotional first.

I.E. VS. E.G. (Chas Belov): The use of "i.e." where "e.g." belongs and vice versa is so common that I included it in my copyeditors' anthem, "We Will Mark You," a dozen years ago:
Buddy, you got asterisks, got no footnotes;
Don't know what "comprise" and "fulsome" mean!
You wrote "i.e.," but you meant "e.g.";
Can't get your verbs and your nouns to agree.

We will, we will mark you!
/*/ I did that *Super Mario*-themed *New York Times* crossword via the *Seattle Times* website sometime in August; it had appeared in New York in July. I suspect that all the other papers that run the *Times* puzzle have the same five-week delay. If it helps, the puzzle that ran in Seattle on 20 September was titled "Take the Edge Off" and ran in New York on 16 August. The Seattle puzzle of 27 September was titled "Small Change" and ran in New York on 23 August. Watch for a Halloween-themed puzzle appearing after Thanksgiving and a Thanksgiving-themed one appearing after Christmas. /*/ (¢APA-NEWS) "I see APA-News is listed before my cover. ¿Would that qualify as a mistake of the month?" Probably not; maybe a Quirk of the Month. I always release the APA-NEWS first so that it comes first in the text edition. Since the covers I add on the hardcopy edition don't appear in the text edition, there was never a question before about where a submitted cover, or its placeholder e-mail, should go in the text batting order. If you submit more covers, I

may have to re-think it. /*/ (çme) “I ATEN’T DEAD YET” is a Pratchett reference. Granny Weatherwax, the most powerful witch on the Discworld, can temporarily take over an animal’s body with her consciousness so as to use the animal as a scout or spy; when she does that, her own body is inert until she returns to it, so she holds a handmade sign with those words lest anyone venture upon her and misinterpret her unresponsive state. /*/ “Not traveling until and unless they have a vaccine that definitely blocks COVID...” meaning one with 100% effectiveness? Yeah, you’re going to be waiting a long time for that. By the way, both Pfizer and

Moderna released newly updated COVID vaccines about a month ago, targeting the XFG variant of the virus. Both Donna and I got our shots last week at the rehab. /*/ “You might check whether your library card gives you online access to print editions of various newspapers.” Online access to print editions? Isn’t that an oxymoron? I recently discovered that I can access the past three years of *Harper’s Magazine* online through my library, but when I search on “New York Times,” I only get books about or published by the newspaper, plus microfilmed editions, which I’d have to trudge down to the central library to access. Not really worth the hassle.



(*Rabbits Against Magic* by Jonathan Lemon, 24 August 2026)

So as the nor’easter approaches and provides the TV newsfolk with fodder for apocalyptic warnings, I guess it’s time to pause for another month and hope there’ll be better things to report next time. A happy Indigenous Columbus Day to all, and make sure your pumpkin patch is sincere before it’s too late.

>Portions of the preceding contain heartfelt sentiment.<